

DRAFT West Tisbury FY 2015 Community Development Strategy

West Tisbury is a community of 2,740 year-round residents located on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, Dukes County, Massachusetts. Known for its rural character, West Tisbury values its historic structures, woodlands, fields, ponds, streams and wetlands. To grow sustainably in a rapidly changing world, we must integrate protection of these sensitive environmental resources with responsible development of our residential and commercial areas, and care for the physical and economic well-being of all citizens.

West Tisbury has produced this planning document to guide the development of its community, in concert with our Island neighbors. The six towns on the Island of Martha's Vineyard have long been committed to regional planning. Created in 1974, the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) is charged with safeguarding the Island's "natural, historical, scientific, and cultural" characteristics from inappropriate or harmful development while at the same time promoting sound local economies. In 2010, the MVC published the Island Plan that was a comprehensive planning document with community input from the six Island towns. The Martha's Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment (MVHNA), which was sponsored by all six Towns and the MVC, was published in 2013.

West Tisbury's Community Development Strategy seeks to implement sustainable growth strategies in four areas: open space, housing, transportation and economic development. This Community Development Strategy centers on these four concentrations and contains input from numerous constituencies as well as planning documents and other studies. This document draws on the guidance of the 1987 West Tisbury Master Plan, 2000 Open Space Plan, and 2004 Community Development Plan. The Board of Selectmen solicited the input from the Affordable Housing Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission, in addition to the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority and the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The guidance from the planning documents in addition to the input from local and regional boards was essential to produce the FY 2015 Community Development Strategy which will be reviewed and updated annually.

Background:

Economic Development encompasses many regional issues that affect the island of Martha's Vineyard. Issues such as housing, transportation, infrastructure, and the environment all play a role in the Island's ability to attract and sustain businesses, tourists, and the cultural continuity of the community. Economic Development and Affordable Housing are two interrelated and fundamental concerns on the Vineyard. Much of the local economy is driven by seasonal residents and visitors but in order for the Island to retain its economic vitality it is imperative that the Island preserve and protect its natural resources and the environment in addition to providing safe, decent, and affordable housing rental and homeownership options for its workforce.

Today seasonal residents (second homeowners) and hundreds of thousands of short-term visitors come to the island attracted by the unique natural, historical, and cultural values that define the beauty and character of Martha's Vineyard. As a seasonal and vacation destination, the number of people on the Island changes dramatically from the peak season to the off season. It is estimated that the year-round population of almost 16,460 (US Census 2010) swells to about 75,000 during the peak summer months of July and August.

The fact that 43% of the Island's housing stock is occupied year-round is testament to the tremendous demand for seasonal homes in a highly desirable vacation and retirement destination. This strong demand equates to high housing costs. The affordability gap – the difference between median home costs and what a family can afford on a median income – remains dauntingly large. The *Housing Needs Assessment* found an affordability gap of \$225,000 in September of 2012, when the median home value on the Vineyard was \$535,000, and that value has climbed steadily in the months since then. Island rents are similarly high: the study found that year-round rentals are largely beyond the reach of people earning less than the median

income. The Island's average weekly wage was 71% of the state average; the median home price was 54% above the state's median, and the median rent exceeded the state's by 17%.

According to the 2008 Economic Profile for Martha's Vineyard Study, the average wages of year-round residents was 27% below the state's average, while according to a 2008 Cost of Living Study by the MVC, the overall cost of living on the Vineyard is about 70% higher than the national average and 26% higher than Boston. The simple fact is that second home buyers can outbid year-round residents for housing. The affordability gap is still too wide for those seeking to enter the Vineyard housing market. Therefore, lending credibility to the argument that the Island's housing problem is not a shortage of supply but a matter of affordability. The affordability gap is still too wide for those seeking to enter the Vineyard housing market and the year-round rental market is highly competitive, expensive and limited. Many individuals and families are displaced from their winter rentals during the summer and are forced to do the "Island Shuffle" where one must find temporary housing or some form of shelter in the summer. The MV Housing Needs Assessment noted that winter rentals might be more affordable, but individuals and families who rent these units risk becoming homeless during the summer season.

The driving force of the Island's economic base is the second homeowner. Vineyard towns are financially dependent on seasonal residents and second homeowners because they pay property taxes but do not require the most costly of services - education. However visitors do require higher levels of some town services, emergency services in particular. The extreme fluctuations from peak season to the winter season place severe strains on the Island's infrastructure facilities for water, sewer, solid waste, and especially the Island's road network. The tourist and seasonal nature of the Vineyard poses significant challenges to the Island towns to be able to balance the needs of a growing (and aging) year-round population while accommodating the needs of a seasonal population.

Objective One: Open Space and Recreation

The West Tisbury Open Space and Recreation Plan identified 6,536 acres, 42% of the town, as having some degree of protected open space. The major focus of the town moving forward will be the establishment and protection of buffer zones between developed areas and open space, including public access to waterways and roadside green belts. Water quality is a key issue and the town is dedicated to protecting surface water, watersheds, and public wells zones through conservation protection and education of the public on issues such as nitrogen loading, run off, Title V, and management of vegetation and invasive species. These programs will continue under the direction of the Wetlands Protection Act and West Tisbury Wetlands Protection By-law. The town has identified sensitive parcels for additional conservation protection, including open space in under served areas.

Current work with the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank, Martha's Vineyard Commission, Dukes Conservation District, Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group, Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society, and private land owners include:

- A. Develop Management Plan to address invasive species in West Tisbury's ponds
- B. Continue to support and work with the Tisbury Great Pond Riparian Owners Association to review development projects in nitrogen sensitive watersheds.
- C. Expansion of public ownership along Tisbury Great Pond Beach
- D. Continue to provide town funding for Shellfish Propagation Program and Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group
- E. Continue to support trial mussel farm off of coast of West Tisbury
- F. Continue to support the Dukes County and Menemsha Commercial Fisheries and all their programs
- G. Strengthen the viability of local agriculture and sustainable food systems. Consider adopting

a Right to Farm By-law

- H. Continue to support groups such as the Dukes Conservation District and Water Alliance.
- I. Develop bike paths connecting existing paths in Edgartown to West Tisbury. Utilize paths as a safe alternative transportation system.
- J. Continue to support the Joint Transportation Committee's (JTC) Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Committee.
- K. Addition of roads to the Special Ways District of Critical Planning Concern as developed by the MVC. This designation will expand protections for historic multi-use pathways linking island towns.

Sustainable Development Principles: Protect Land and Eco-systems, Use Natural Resources Wisely, Plan Regionally.

Objective Two: Housing

In recent years, the towns and non-profit organizations have had great success in addressing various segments of Island's housing needs. In the year 2000, a very successful community housing forum helped catalyze significant public interest in housing affordability and resulted in the creation of several community housing organizations. Since 2001, there are more than 20 organizations and committees committed to addressing the Island's housing needs. All six towns have adopted the Community Preservation Act and five towns have established a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund. In 2013, the MV Housing Needs Assessment was published and this past September MVC has just released a Draft Affordable and Community Housing Zoning Analysis. Over the last 25 years, the towns and non-profit housing entities have created 608 subsidized housing (rental and homeownership) units on Martha's Vineyard and 404 of those units qualify for the state's Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory.

With the past economic recession and current unstable economy, the demand for housing those earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income has become much greater along with a small but growing homeless population. The challenge for working people with lower means to purchasing a single-family home is further exacerbated by limited housing options. According to the 2010 Census, ninety-one percent of the Vineyard's housing stock consists of detached, single-family homes, creating a shortage of rental housing and of multi-unit housing that could serve the needs of younger people starting out and older residents who can no longer maintain a home. Current zoning allows multi-family development within a small portion of the Island with very limited infrastructure for water and wastewater.

In September, the MVC has just released a final Draft Affordable and Community Housing Zoning Analysis on Martha's Vineyard as recommended by the Island Plan and MV Housing Needs Assessment. The Zoning Analysis document is a resource document that identifies zoning practices that are or could be used on Martha's Vineyard to promote, create, and preserve housing that responds to the needs of the population that are not adequately met by market rate housing. The Healthy Aging Housing Work Group and Joint Affordable Housing Group is working with the Planning Boards and Affordable Housing Committees to review town zoning by-laws to consider options to diversify the Island's housing stock – as recommended by the MV Housing Needs Assessment. This effort is geared to not only address the housing needs for affordable housing as well as year-round and seasonal workforce housing but particularly the Island's 65 plus aging demographic. West Tisbury has lead the Island when it comes to innovative zoning to create both homeownership and rental opportunities for affordable housing recipients.

West Tisbury has worked hard to create programs to address those below the 80% area median income bracket. In the homeownership category West Tisbury has a bylaw allowing for creation of residential

homesites on non-conforming lots. At present there are 40 single family homes that have deeds restricting the resale value in perpetuity. The majority of these homes are at the 80% of AMI. West Tisbury has an accessory apartment bylaw to help provide affordable year-round rental housing based on 80% median income using DCHD tables. There are 41 units presently within the town. There are also subsidized rental units within the town but continued effort is still needed. The Vineyard needs to respond to the pressing housing needs that are simply not met by the private market. This should favor creating more affordable housing units, either with the existing housing stock or through new construction. The Vineyard should also look for ways to help affordable housing projects, deal with zoning regulations, the costs of wastewater treatment, energy efficiency, home and septic repairs in addition to other objectives identified by island towns.

Participating in the Community Development Block Grant program for affordable housing rehabilitation is a top priority for the town of West Tisbury. A true advantage of the program is the ability to rehabilitate existing housing stock which is in keeping with sustainable growth objectives of the town. The CDBG's Childcare subsidy program has been a great help in enabling families to continue working or seek employment opportunities while knowing that their children are cared for. The Town of West Tisbury understands the importance of supporting low and moderate income residents who preform many of the jobs that sustain the rest of the town and Island's workforce as well as our aging population.

West Tisbury has done and will continue to do the following to promote affordable housing:

- A. Participate in DHCD's Community Development Block Grant Rehabilitation Program
- B. Participate in DHCD's Community Development Block Grant Childcare Subsidy Program
- C. Continue in our efforts to increase the affordable housing supply in perpetuity for year-round residents. With the greatest emphasis on those residents earning 80% or below AMI. This is where the greatest need lies.
- D. Continue to increase the supply of rental units especially for the elderly.
- E. Continue to provide financial support to DCRHA's rental assistance program mainly through the CPA funds.
- F. Continue to encourage the town to supply financial support to DCRHA costs, as the authority is a great asset to the development and management of affordable properties.
- G. Continue to support and utilize the funding of the West Tisbury Affordable Housing Trust by applying for trust funding through the Community Preservation Committee applications and other funding opportunities.
- H. Seek out land in town that is appropriate for affordable housing development.
- I. Continue to create and maintain affordable housing for low and moderate income families in perpetuity. Whether with homeownership or rental units.
- J. Continue to create permanent affordable housing for those earning up to 140% of the Area Median Income concentrating on those under 80%.
- K. Continue to try and reach the 10% state goal of affordable year-round housing as defined by DHCD.
- L. Encourage businesses to use the bylaws to create affordable housing in the mixed business district.
- M. Work with other town boards and other island groups to develop new affordable housing initiatives.
- N. Continue to refine bylaws that can help encourage and create affordable housing in both the rental and homeownership realm with the help of the town Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals. Possibly creating some new bylaws.
- O. Seek out any and all potential town owned and private buildings appropriate for converting to affordable housing.
- P. Continue to provide educational materials on the affordable housing opportunities in West Tisbury. Keeping the Affordable Housing Guidebook up to date.
- Q. Advocate and continue to assure permanent deed restrictions are maintained on all affordable housing properties whether through non-profit development, homeowner development or

subdivision requirements. These deed restrictions should be placed on the properties at time of development in perpetuity and recorded in the Registry of Deeds. Emphasis being that these affordable homes be at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) for Dukes County.

- R. Advocate and continue to assure deed restrictions running with properties in perpetuity are kept up-to-date on all affordable properties. This requires being involved in any refinancing, sale or foreclosure of affordable housing carrying a WTAHC Covenant.
- S. Interface, provide, and seek guidance from other town boards, departments, committees, state, federal, regional, nonprofits, public and private housing agencies and organizations.
- T. Stay abreast of affordable housing issues within the community, Island, and the state.
- U. Revisit all town affordable housing documents every year to assure accuracy and compliance with state laws and regulations.

Sustainable Development Principles: Expand Housing Opportunities, Advance Equity, Concentrate Development and Mixed Uses, Plan Regionally

Objective Three: Economic Development

Tourism and the second home industry is the Island's economic base, therefore, the town may want to consider formulating Economic Development strategies that support tourism and development/service sector industries without degrading the town's natural resources and rural character. The town of West Tisbury has taken key steps in promoting the local economy sustainably in areas of aquaculture, commercial fishing, and farming.

The town has supported Island commercial fishermen through the Dukes County/Menemsha Commercial Fishermen's Association. The Association is an advocacy group for local fishermen in dealing with state and federal fishing regulations as well as responsible for conducting education and out reach programs to the general public. In 2009, the town of West Tisbury in conjunction with Chilmark is participating in a Trial Mussel Farm Program to cultivate mussels within town coastal waters off shore. The town has supported the preservation of active farmland through agricultural and conservation restrictions.

Island businesses continue to struggle with the past recession and an unstable global economy. The Island towns have felt these impacts more acutely in areas of retail, construction, and hospitality because of the Vineyard's visitor based economy. Island unemployment rates for the past five winters ('09, '10, '11, '12, and '13) have exceeded double digits. In February 2014, the unemployment rate was 11.8% which surpassed the Massachusetts rate at 6.5% and the US rate at 6.7% for that month. The town has taken proactive steps in response to the Island's high seasonal unemployment rates. The town seeks ways to assist working parents or those looking for employment with the support they need to actively participate in the workforce through the CDBG Childcare Subsidy Program. The town also sets a priority to hire members of the local workforce and Island businesses when there are Municipal Development Projects such as the construction of the new Public Library.

It is important for the Island to ensure it has adequate infrastructure for a growing year-round population. The Island towns' water, solid waste, public facilities, and roads are placed under tremendous pressure during the summer months. The Island towns' public facility buildings such as the police, fire, library, and school buildings are in or will need repairs and on-going maintenance as well as the Island's road network. As mentioned previously, West Tisbury does not have public water or sewer services. West Tisbury and the entire Island is facing a critical problem protecting its water resources because of the nitrogen loading primarily from residential septic systems. One option to better manage the nitrogen loading problem is to establish a Septic Repair Program.

West Tisbury has also pursued an interest in reconciling protection of the town's rural character with the promotion of emerging alternative energy generation technology projects. The town is actively working with an island-wide work group to create regulations for the development of wind turbines while safeguarding nearby residents and significant community resources. A solar energy project is being investigated at the Town's Transfer Station. The town has an established Energy Committee and the town is represented on the Cape Light Compact (CLC).

The Cape Light Compact has been helpful in providing stable energy prices to residents of West Tisbury. CLC's energy efficiency programs such as energy audits, lighting, and energy retrofits in town buildings, rebates for the purchase of energy efficient appliances, and conservation education in the schools has resulted in a town-wide energy savings. To ensure economic and environmental viability for town residents, particularly those with low and moderate incomes, the town will continue to expand these initiatives. The Energy Committee continues to promote the expansion of energy efficiency and renewable energy technology in town buildings, town affordable housing projects, and within the community at large.

Sustainable Development Principles: Concentrate Development, Mixed Uses, Plan Regionally, Use Natural Resources Wisely, Increase Job and Business Opportunities

Objective Four: Transportation

As an Island, Martha's Vineyard faces unique transportation challenges. A particular challenge is dealing with transportation with a year-round and seasonal population and low density development overall. There is a tendency to rely on a car to travel around the island even though there is great reluctance to widen roads since the Island's network of two-lane rural roads is an important feature of the Island's character. Town centers are dominated by expensive seasonal homes, pushing lower income residents to lower-cost properties on the edges of town, where there is little access to employment, shopping, or services without driving a car. A fundamental dilemma is how to deal with these and other challenges, while preserving the Island's character and environment, which are the driving force of Martha's Vineyard's visitor-based economy. By continuing our partnership with our neighboring towns, the town of West Tisbury can resolve some of these issues.

The Martha's Vineyard Regional Transit Authority (VTA) provides year-round transit services to the six Island towns and has surpassed ridership of 1 million passengers for the past several years. The VTA also offers year-round specialty medical transport and weekly van service off-island to Boston area medical services. The Island Councils on Aging have also worked to alleviate transportation issues for senior citizens by offering Taxi service from the Woods Hole Ferry Terminal to medical facilities in Falmouth, Mashpee, and Sandwich. The town has also worked to improve traffic flow and congestion particularly at the intersection of Old County Road and State Road as well as participate on the Scenic Roads Committee. The town also works with the VTA and MVC on regional transportation issues as well as road improvement programs through the Joint Transportation Committee and its Bike and Pedestrian Advisory Committee. The town has also participated in Mass-in-Motion's Complete Streets Workshop Programs.

Sustainable Development Principles: Plan Regionally, Concentrate Development, Provide Transportation Choices, Use Natural Resources Wisely, Advance Equity

Development Priorities:

1. Secure Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds to assist income eligible homeowners to make necessary repairs to their homes while retaining the existing affordable housing stock.

2. Seek CDBG grant funds to assist income eligible residents with needed childcare costs while providing a more stable year-round workforce.
3. Seek CDBG grant funds to create Septic Repair Program.
4. Continue to support the town's Shellfish Propagation Program
5. Support the Chilmark and West Tisbury Mussel Farm Project
6. Support the Dukes County / Menemsha Commercial Fishermen's Association.
7. Update and revise zoning by-laws to promote Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation